

November 8, 2004

Washington State Board of Health
P.O. Box 47990
Olympia, WA 98504-7990

Dear State Board of Health Members,

I am writing to you to express my urgent concerns about the health of Washington State school children. Each school day in Washington State, tens of thousands of children are ingesting school drinking water that is contaminated with lead, cadmium, copper, iron, and bacteria.

The State Board of Health is responsible for setting environmental health and safety standards for schools. Moreover, the Board is responsible for overseeing the Department of Health's implementation of Board policy. I am calling upon you today to take immediate action to stop the needless damage to our state's school children, by preventing them from drinking contaminated school drinking water.

Over the past two years, our state has witnessed the gross mismanagement of operating and capital budgets by the Seattle School District. Moreover, our entire nation is watching what is happening in the Seattle Schools, and how Washington State deals with its school drinking water crisis. Seattle parents have been lied to about contaminated water, denied access to lead test results, and their children have been repeatedly re-exposed to lead contaminated water, despite their constant efforts to stop it.

In 2001-2002, the Seattle School District conducted a study (called the Phase VII study) to examine whether corrosion was making lead contamination in drinking water worse. Out of 27 schools examined, 9 were found to have one or more fountain above the EPA action limit of 20 ppb. Only one of the 9 schools was warned about the danger. Because no one else was notified, water consumption continued as usual in the other 8 schools, including Aki Kurose Middle School, a school that had 50% of its fountains testing above 20 ppb for lead! These actions are scandalous and unforgivable.

In the recent BTA II capital levy, 6 Seattle schools were budgeted for waterline work. Parents were lied to about the nature of this waterline work. The District has stated for months that the waterline projects were for science labs. Only recently, has the District's head facilities planner admitted that the waterline projects were placed on the levy because the 6 schools had high lead AND low water pressure. No one in these schools

was warned about the high lead! Water consumption was allowed to continue, even though the schools were scheduled to be repaired!

The full truth about these waterline projects has not been revealed. Parents suspect that District administrators were concerned about bacterial growth in drinking water pipes with low water pressure. Corroded drinking water pipes with poor perfusion can provide ideal growth environments for pathogenic bacteria, including Legionella, the bacterium that causes Legionnaire's Disease. Over the past 12 years, District administrators have violated numerous federal and state health and safety statutes with impunity. It is absolutely shocking that not a single regulatory agency has stepped forth to reprimand the Seattle School District for its ongoing egregious actions. Tens of thousands of children have been knowingly and needlessly exposed to dangerous levels of heavy metals in their school drinking water.

Can you imagine the depth of the outrage in our community? Can you image the depth of outrage in the legislature?

Seattle parents and grandparents are at their wits end. They have exhausted nearly every executive and legislative avenue to protect their children from contaminated school drinking water. They are ready to turn to the courts, in order to stop schools from harming their children further.

I ask you as a legislator, as a citizen, and as a grandmother:

(1) Assume immediate jurisdiction over the Seattle Public Schools. The remediation efforts currently underway place children at risk from drinking high levels of lead, cadmium, copper and bacteria.

(2) Order the Seattle School District to restore bottled water to all schools that have not been adequately tested for heavy metals and bacteria.

The situation in Seattle is grave, and is clearly beyond the capabilities and perspectives of the District's lawyer, who has been placed in charge of the drinking water quality program. Outside of Seattle, school drinking water across the state must be immediately tested. I urge you to order all School Districts in our state to provide bottled water to their students while their drinking water is tested.

The Seattle School District scandal serves as a lesson to us all. We cannot leave child safety in the hands of administrators who are given voluntary guidelines. Strict external oversight on school environmental safety must be provided. Policy must come quickly from the State Board of Health.

I urge you to act immediately. Seattle School Board Director Sally Soriano took immediate action within minutes after learning about the extensive lead problem in the

Seattle Schools. She persuaded her fellow Board to take immediate action, and to provide bottled water to children to stop the damage to their bodies. As our state's highest body dealing with policy issues of health and safety, you should feel compelled to follow the example of Director Sally Soriano. Immediately order bottled water for all of the state's untested schools. Then proceed with the task of providing regulatory safeguard to provide our state school children from contaminated school drinking water.

You cannot delay these actions. You have no excuse to leave untested drinking water sources in operation, while you know, with certainty, that some school children are ingesting damaging levels of heavy metal toxins.

I have a 4-year-old grandson in a preschool center at the Ingraham High School in Seattle. He too was provided contaminated drinking water by the Seattle Public Schools. I know the feelings of every parent and grandparent in our state who learns the truth about what has been happening in our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maralyn Chase". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maralyn" written in a larger, more prominent style than the last name "Chase".

Maralyn Chase
State Representative
32nd Legislative District

"I am not sure how many 'sins' I would recognize in the world. But I can imagine none that is more irredeemably sinful than the betrayal, the exploitation, of the young by those who should care for them." - Elizabeth Janeway